People who live in towns envy those who live in the country; whenever a Golden Age has been imagined, it has included no cities. Theocritus was living in Alexandria when he invented pastoral poetry; Virgil wrote his bucolics for the citizens of Rome. These literary forms disappeared during the Dark Ages, when no such idealization of country life was possible, but as the amenities of existence began to return in the prosperous towns of the later Middle Ages, once again those who enjoyed them began to pretend to wish they lacked them, and spoke longingly of the pleasures of poverty, of simple but wholesome food, of a life without ambition and contention, of love unfettered by convention—all desirables to be found only in rural regions. These joys, from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, were the privileges of the peasant, according to the town dweller and the aristocrat.

In antiquity, in the later Middle Ages, and in the Renaissance it is the shepherd among the country folk who is most frequently the subject of poetry and the visual arts. As early as the twelfth century, the French verse form, the pastourelle, was invented; it describes an encounter between a knight and a simple country girl, who is always a shepherdess. Sometimes he wins the inevitable contest, sometimes she; in the most famous development of the story, the thirteenth-century play Le Jeu de Robin et Marion, Marion resists the knight and remains faithful to Robin, who is, of course, a shepherd. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the shepherd was often used as a symbol of the common man; actors dressed as shepherds greeted princes making solemn entries into cities, and added their deliberately naive compliments to the fulsome praises of more learned folk. An almanac and compendium of useful knowledge was published in 1491 as the Kalendar des Bergiers, and judging from the number of editions, was most successful (Charles VIII of France owned an illuminated copy), though one wonders how many genuine shepherds could read it. Remy Belleau, publishing in 1565 a miscellany of prose and verse in praise of the country, called it La Bergerie.

All these shepherds and shepherdesses are well contented with their lot; those who take part in the medieval Nativity plays frequently describe their way of life as delightful.

Fi de richesse et de soucy!
Il n’est vie si bien nourrie
Qui vaille estat de pastourie!

“Down with riches and care! There’s no life, however well fed, that’s as good as the pastoral estate,” say the shepherds in the Mystère de la Passion, written about 1452. At this time, shepherds often appear in the visual arts, and so
frequently are they seen at work and at play (not much distinction is shown between these activities) that the French call the works in which they are depicted bergeries. The shepherds of bergeries bear much the same relation to their counterparts in real life as the little people of chinoiseries do to the inhabitants of China. The season is never winter in a bergerie, and the flocks are more a part of the decoration than the reason for the shepherd's existence. They, with their keepers, are seen among the trees and flowers of the millefleurs tapestries that at this time covered the stone walls of bleak castle halls with the loveliness of woods and fields. The Metropolitan Museum owns such a tapestry—Country Life: Shepherd and Shepherdesses—a Franco-Flemish work of about 1500, the gift of George Blumenthal, published in this Bulletin in July 1928, and it has recently acquired, as a gift from Mr. Charles Zadok, a somewhat later piece that, nevertheless, still expresses the late medieval idea of the shepherd's sweet lot, lacking riches, but also without cares, and pleasantly enlivened with sexual license.

This tapestry is one of a series known as the Loves of Gombaut and Macée, the latter name a diminutive of the feminine form of Matthew. The story can be followed most easily, not in the tapestries, of which no complete set exists, but in eight woodcuts by Jean Le Clerc, made about 1587. These are thought to have been copied from the tapestries rather than to have served as models for them; a Gombaut and Macée tapestry is mentioned in an inventory of 1532 and some of the extant examples also probably antedate the woodcuts. But the best evidence for an early
Details of the verdure section of the Gombaut and Macée tapestry

date for the designs of the tapestries is the language of the verse inscriptions that occur on them, as linguistic experts state that this is a fifteenth-century form of French. The verses, also, are in a typically late medieval style.

It is these verses that tell the simple story and the names of the chief characters. Each tapestry and print gives the words spoken by some of the personages shown, as well as a longer verse explaining the scene as a whole. The first four tapestries are identified as Ages of Man; when ten years old the shepherds and shepherdesses chase butterflies; when fifteen they play tiquet, a game which looks very much like croquet; when twenty they dance; when twenty-five they feast, though only on coarse biscuits, water, and strawberries. On the later pieces, no age is given for the protagonists; Gombaut is betrothed to Macée in the fifth scene, he marries her in the sixth, is called on to drive away a wolf in the seventh, and is himself pursued by Death in the eighth. The Museum’s tapestry is of the second subject, the game of tiquet or boules. The verses, on scrolls floating near the people who are supposed to be speaking them (like balloons in a comic strip), are probably best left in the decent obscurity of late medieval French, but a suitably free translation might read as follows:

Shepherd (on extreme left, embracing a girl):
Underneath this shady tree
I find you most conveniently;
Margot, I must kiss you, so!

Margot:
That please me beyond compare!
A kiss can drive away dull care,
When given by a fine young beau!

Shepherdess (one of the two holding mallets):
My friend Jacquet, I beg of you
Set the game up, straight and true,
Before to strike the balls you start.

Jacquet (adjusting a cone for the game):
You need not be afraid of me!
Your useful ball-boy let me be;
I’ll set the game up good and smart.

Gombaut (with hand raised, on extreme right):
Shepherdess, so fat and rosy,
As bottoms-up I hold you cozy,
Smack your behind, I am enraged to!

Shepherdess (we hope, Macée):
Gombaut, your hand is much too free!
And then, it is not courtesy
To smack a girl you’re not engaged to!
In summertime, when all is green,
On the grass sports sweet fifteen,
Blithely the shepherdesses play;
And if there's too much disarray,
'Tis natural to enjoy what's seen.

The landscape, in which the game of love is being played more enthusiastically than the boules, is a summery one, with bright red cherries conspicuous on the tree in the center and the necessary sheep peacefully cropping the grass in the middle distance. The colors are brilliant throughout, with much use of red, pink, and blue and a dark blue-green. In the verdures section at the bottom, among the flowers, lurk a number of birds, including an eagle and a melancholy owl with its little ones. The borders have a pink ground and are more markedly Renaissance in style than the central scene; the winged grotesques above, the rams' heads below, the classical vases with masks, the rather clumsy strapwork, in blue, suggest a date late in the sixteenth century. The pastoral theme is echoed in the medallion motifs; on the sides, distaffs and shearing tools; above, the shepherd's crook, staff, and bottle; below, his bagpipes and other rural wind instruments.

The popularity of the Gombaut and Macée tapestries is apparent from the number that have survived, in several versions. They have been much studied for over a century. The fact that Molière, in L'Avare, mentioned one among a list of presumably almost worthless objects (such as "a Bolognese lute, with all its strings, or nearly so," and "a lizard's skin, three and a half feet long, stuffed with hay; an agreeable curiosity to hang from the ceiling of a room") aroused the interest of literary students, and the discovery of the French medieval poem of the inscriptions, not otherwise published, gave the series an added value. An author for the verses has even been suggested, Henri Baude (about 1430 to about 1491), who wrote in the same meter and rhyme scheme and one of whose works was called Dictz moraux pour mettre en tapisserie. "Moral," however, is not the adjective that springs to mind in describing the sayings on these tapestries.

The earliest version of the tapestries was presumably French, but the only certainly French examples that have survived were made at the Gobelins manufactory in the first half of the seventeenth century. In the Jeu de Tiquet panel of this set, it is perhaps a sign of the times that what might be called the "Kiss-me-Kate" episode has been omitted. There are also scattered
Tapestry: the Jeu de Tiquet, the second episode in the series The Loves of Gombaut and Macée. Flemish (Bruges), late XVI Century. Height 11 feet 5 inches
Gift of Charles Zadok, 1958

tapestries of the subject with the Brussels marks. But by far the most frequently found type is that of the Metropolitan Museum piece, with bagpipes in the borders and clear, brilliant colors, unlike those of most tapestries of this period. These versions were long considered to have been made in a French provincial workshop, but Mme Marthe Crick-Kuntziger finally found a Bruges mark on three specimens. Bruges is in the Flemish-speaking part of Belgium, and the fact that the verses were not translated (people rich enough to buy tapestries could presumably read French) is another proof, if one were needed, that we are not concerned here with a realistic portrayal of life in the country.

Another indication of widespread familiarity with these scenes is their appearance, in a slightly simplified form, on an embroidered tablecloth given to the Museum by Judge Irwin Untermyer. This is a large panel, about nine by five feet, probably Flemish, in tent stitch in wool and silk, with a central section of flowers and fruit; the border, though without inscriptions, shows incidents taken from the first six tapestries of the story of Gombaut and Macée, arranged in the proper order. The children chasing butterflies are missing, but there are the girl washing her feet and the bird's-nesters from the first tapestry; the players and the smacking scene from the Jeu de Tiquet; the bagpipe player and the high-stepping dancers from the third; the envious gentlefolk and the feasters from the fourth; the betrothal of the fifth, and, making a happy ending, the marriage. Even on the tapestries, Gombaut's later life is rarely shown; the onslaught of wolves and the approach of death are not really in keeping with the pastoral idea.

Rarely, indeed, before the nineteenth century is there any evidence of what the peasant's life actually was. Villon, a townsman himself, knew enough of what it was like to live on the very food mentioned in the feast tapestry, "gros pain bis," and to drink nothing but water all the year round, to say that "all the birds from here to
"Babylon" would not persuade him to live such a life for a single morning. The English shepherds of the late medieval Townley plays surprisingly complain of poverty and oppression and of the wickedness of women before they go to Bethlehem, though their French counterparts speak, as has been said, praises of their life and crack some improper jokes. Only in the famous

tries were not woven after the seventeenth century, other peasants frolic in the *Pastorales* of Boucher and the shepherd's life continued to be pictured as one of blissful simplicity, though less and less savored with the salt of *l'esprit gaulois*, until the French Revolution. By this time the long history of the pastoral idea had died out with the play-acting of Marie Antoinette at the Petit Trianon, and when the countryman reappears in literature it is in the realistic poems and novels of the nineteenth century. Today, so completely has the useful word "shepherd" come to be associated with the inanities of Strephons and Corydons that, we are told, the modern

passage in La Bruyère's *Caractères* do we catch a glimpse of the French peasant as he was in the seventeenth century: one sees, he says, "certain wild animals, males and females, scattered about the countryside, attached to the soil in which they dig and which they cultivate with an unconquerable stubbornness; they have something like an articulate speech, and when they rise to their feet they show human faces; in fact, they are men."

Nothing like this was said again for a long time. Though the Gombaut and Macée tapestry

sheepmen insist on being called "sheepherders," a name which has no unfortunate connotations.

It is interesting to speculate why the pastoral, after such a successful career, vanished so suddenly and so completely. Perhaps its function as escape literature was taken over in the late eighteenth century by the "Gothick" novel, dealing with the entrancing horrors of an imaginary Middle Ages? Certainly the desire of the townsman to get away from it all (the bonds of convention as well as the rat race) has not lessened. One can suggest that the niche the pasto-
Detail of the tablecloth. The feast

cental story filled in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is occupied today by an equally stereotyped artistic form, the Western. But though the townsman of earlier centuries wished to escape from turmoil into quietude, the discontented modern, like the reader of the "Gothick" novel, longs to exchange monotony for excitement. Granting this fundamental difference as to what constitutes escape, one can extend the comparison to cover a number of details: cattle take the place of sheep, ballads of the range are heard instead of the shepherd's pipes, a trusty Colt protects as well as a sheepdog. But for Macée, the loving shepherdess, we have only the noble and less demanding horse, on whose brow the cowboy may, at the end of the story, implant a chaste kiss. Very little sex but a great deal of sudden death can be said to be characteristic of this literary form. But instead of the great variety of works of art and literature inspired by the pastoral idea, the Western has found little expression except in the form of novels and motion pictures, few of which, one imagines, are destined for immortality. Gombaut and Macée, and all their pleasant companions, on the other hand, in their eternal Arcadia, will continue forever to "flee the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world."